

ASG Judy Cheng-Hopkins' Speech

GENEVA PEACEBUILDING PLATFORM
ANNUAL FORUM
"SAVING LIVES OR BUILDING PEACE?"

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***Humanitarians versus Peacebuilders:
False Dichotomies, Real Dilemmas'***

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen

I am indeed honoured to have been asked to deliver the keynote address amidst such luminaries here today. My friend Charles Vincent has asked me to cut the usual UN you-know-what and get to the point so I will try.

1. Perhaps the organizers of this conference feel as I do that this humanitarian versus peacebuilding debate is coming to a head and that we need to try even harder to see how we can resolve it. This is actually a kind of incestuous topic because people outside our community don't know much about it and don't really care. But for those of us on the inside it is getting so serious, it may even be getting in the way of our work and our effectiveness when it comes to the people we are trying to help. Thus, I think it is very astute of the organizers to have organized the conference around this theme. At the outset I would like to clarify that by peacebuilders I mean all those involved in the political, security and development dimensions of work in Post-Conflict countries because what is peacebuilding but an activity encompassing all three? Of course some humanitarians consider themselves peacebuilders too but for the sake of argument, I am considering them as separate from peacebuilders.

2. For those of you who know me, you'll know that I am not the sort to be standing here with rich theories and high falutin concepts, grand ideas or grand schemes but rather am more the down to earth type interested only in getting on with the business at hand. With thirty years in this field I have been on all sides of the divides: humanitarian, development and peacebuilding and I must say that, sad as it is, this polemical debate between humanitarians on one side and peacebuilders on the other comes as no surprise to me as it was bound to come to a head sometime in places as challenging and vexing as Afghanistan and Somalia. Why? I would say as a result of three factors 1) organizational cultures, 2) turf , and 3) principles.

3. When I first went to WFP in 1997 after almost 20 years in UNDP, I was struck by the difference in organizational cultures. At WFP the heroes and role models and champions were the get-to-the-point, logistics types, albeit Intelligent and politically savvy logistics types. At UNDP, the gurus were the macro- economists who would rather be at the World Bank (wannabees), (this is pre BCPR of course). It couldn't be more different and I quickly had to adjust from one to the other.

4. Then there is the issue of turf and that includes competing for scarce resources, not a bad thing as healthy competition is always good.

5. Lastly and most importantly, are the inherently contradictory principles under which each operates. I will go into this in greater detail later.

6. Imagine the backdrop of all this acrimonious debate and theatre; countries in conflict or coming out of conflict as a result of societal conflicts, in chronically weak states within unstable regions of the world. Furthermore, the chances of these places coming out of armed conflict for good are slim, at least in our/my lifetime!

7. On top of this we all instinctively know that the wars of the future are bound to be even more complex because as the world globalizes, so do criminal networks, terrorist organizations, population movements and factors of vulnerability. Will future wars be increasingly resource-based? Especially over oil and water? Will they be intra or inter-state based? What will be the continued impact of persistent state failure in Afghanistan and Somalia on the ability of global terrorists to launch attacks into other countries and affecting entire sub regions? Will the DRC ever coalesce as a viable state? And what about the Sudan, given how weak institutions there remain? Undoubtedly the post-referendum period will likely continue to be fraught with tensions over allocations of resources and territory. As the Head of the PBSO, I am constantly caught in the dilemma of whether to allocate scarce resources to one high risk peacebuilding effort over another.

8. Obviously with climate change and natural disasters becoming ever more prevalent, the combined effects of natural disasters and armed conflicts will be even more of a feature in the future especially in the poorest parts of the developing world. Thus I would say, inevitable as it was for this polarizing debate to come to a head in our era, it couldn't be happening at a worse time when we should be using our best brains and efforts to deal with our common dilemmas that we must resolve.

9. In the meantime, although it is already known to you, I will provide a somewhat exaggerated view of the differences we face and the paradoxes which haunt us.

	PARADOXES	
	View of the humanitarians	View of the peacebuilders
Paradox 1: WHO WE WORK WITH	Peacebuilding requires working with government and national authorities at all costs, including those not upholding human rights principles in the interest of relationship building.	Humanitarians are more comfortable working with non-governmental actors and can undermine nascent state institutions by refusing to engage with them
Paradox 2: POLITICAL SOLUTIONS TO CONFLICT	Peacebuilders place such a high premium on achieving and maintaining political deals that they will look the other way when principles are trampled upon.	Humanitarians usually don't understand the political context within which they operate and often undermine the political strategy.

<p>Paradox 3: PRINCIPLES</p>		
	<p>Humanitarian advocacy is strictly principle driven.</p>	<p>Humanitarian advocacy has a political nature and impact, which humanitarians themselves may sometimes not realise or choose not to realise.</p>

	<p>Furthermore, humanitarians believe Impartiality, independence, humanity, and neutrality are the key principles for humanitarian action.</p> <p>Humanitarian action is principled, peacebuilding – because it is inherently political – cannot be.</p>	<p>Peacebuilders believe UN presences have mandates which are given by multilateral institutions and member states and therefore cannot be neutral.</p> <p>Peacebuilders believe Peacebuilding is in fact principled. It rests on core values such as impartiality, national ownership, participation, inclusiveness.</p>
<p>Paradox 4: DELIVERY APPROACHES</p>	<p>Humanitarians deliver assistance through NGO partners and therefore do not play into the political struggle involving nascent</p>	<p>The choice of not working through nascent state institution is a political decision which could have non-intended consequences such as</p>

<p>Paradox 5: PARTNERSHIPS</p>	<p>state institutions.</p> <p>Humanitarian action is organized within a very broad partnership arrangement which is highly inclusive of NGOs, while the 'political' action is UN centric.</p>	<p>promoting a balance of power in favour of warlords, gatekeepers, and to the detriment of local institutions .</p> <p>Humanitarians in the UN are very dependent on the broader partnership of the IASC which dictates their strategies and limits their ability to act in a coherent manner with the rest of the UN. Peacebuilders require strong partnerships with financial institutions and regional organizations as well.</p>
<p>Paradox 6: INTEGRATION</p>	<p>Integration is fraught with risks for humanitarian action and humanitarians should have a very cautious position on integration.</p>	<p>Integration – structural or not – is a pre-requisite for coherent and efficient international action in a conflict context.</p>

	Humanitarians obtain security through acceptance by host communities and, close association with multidimensional operations of the UN can undermine this.	Multidimensional peacekeeping and political operations can help protect the safe delivery of humanitarian assets, and bring important assets to bear for humanitarians
Paradox 7: SECURITY	Humanitarians prefer soft security: ie acceptance by communities	Peacekeeping or political missions are often heavy on the hardware side of security (close protection, armored vehicles, escorts)

10. As I have said these paradoxes are not without real life impact. They do at times limit our effectiveness and efficiency in addressing common challenges by limiting our ability to pursue coherent strategies.

11. In fact, these paradoxes are so well know by now that even the parties to the conflicts in which we work have become astute at playing us off, one against the other, aware of the difficulties we face in reconciling our different mandates. One very striking recent example of this is when Al Shabaab raided a common UN compound in Southern Somalia but only seized equipment belonging to UNDP, the Political Office and Department of Safety and Security, after which they declared that 'humanitarian' UN organizations were welcome to work in that region of the country, but those who supported the transitional government were banned and would be attacked. Obviously, in this case, humanitarian actors are the pawns and humanitarian aid the booty that is being used in the larger conflict.

12. So as you can see, I am contradicting myself again. The title of my speech was “False Paradoxes: Real Dilemmas”; in fact the paradoxes are not so false. However, humanitarians and peacebuilders have more in common than they think.

13. First, the work of both sets of actors aim essentially to help people better cope with very fragile conditions: while humanitarians move into action in situations of natural or man-made disasters; peacebuilders are required to “take risks for peace” by helping countries to avoid lapsing or relapsing into conflict.

14. Second, at the heart of both our efforts in these fragile contexts is enabling people to rebuild their lives and means of livelihoods in the aftermath of man-made and natural disaster or conflict.

15. Third, both humanitarians and peacebuilders are often called upon to undertake or contribute to institution-building efforts in the countries or societies where they operate. This is quite often a vital task given that both actors care deeply about sustainability of the work they have began. Institution building refers to creating a set of rules or institutional structures which ensure that people continue to have access to basic services.

16. Fourth, working with governments and civil society organisations in creative and non-threatening ways is another common feature to both humanitarians and peacebuilders. Indeed, the ability of humanitarians and peacebuilders to deliver relief or peace dividends critically depends on how the two sets of actors navigate the myriad challenges in the fragile contexts that they work in.

17. Fifth, humanitarians and peace builders always operate in a political context that can define the outcomes of their engagement. How either set of actors' deals with that political context is

important in terms of delivery of results, including coping with the unintended political consequences of their assistance.

18. Thus ladies and gentlemen is the glass half empty or half full? I leave that to you to deliberate in the various panel discussions. I look forward to hearing your various takes on this issue. In ending, I can't help but propose a final way forward; if all else fails, why not try a little DDR? D as in disarm your prejudices, D as in debunk your theories and R as in try Reality check of what matters on the ground.

Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen